

CONGRESS

Mike Johnson's budget plan is at risk of collapse

The Senate is itching to move as the speaker struggles to unify House Republicans.

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Speaker Mike Johnson wanted a budget advanced through committee this week. It's not looking likely. | Francis Chung/POLITICO

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After weeks of promising “one big, beautiful bill,” House Republican leaders are at serious risk of being outmaneuvered by an unlikely GOP alliance as Speaker Mike Johnson struggles to sell his approach to enacting President Donald Trump’s sprawling domestic agenda.

Already a [rebellion among conservative hard-liners](#) has already forced the speaker to scrap his ambitious timeline for advancing the border, energy and tax bill. Senators, meanwhile, are getting antsy about inaction in the House and

are working with Freedom Caucus members on an end-run around Johnson's strategy.

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"They are trying to jam us," said one House GOP lawmaker involved in the ongoing talks, referring to the unusual partnership.

The inter-chamber rivalry over how to pass a budget blueprint is just the latest complication for Republicans as they try to make good on Trump's campaign agenda. Trillions of dollars are at stake as party leaders try to bridge vast differences between hard-right fiscal hawks and swing-district members who are wary of deep cuts, not to mention those with tactical disputes over how the legislation should be sequenced.

Mindful of his razor-thin majority, Johnson has fiercely defended his one-bill approach as he seeks to keep the House in control of the complex party-line budget reconciliation process.

"The Senate will not take the lead," Johnson told reporters Tuesday. "We're gonna take the lead."

But GOP leaders indicated during closed-door meetings Tuesday that they were still negotiating a way forward, according to two people familiar with the conversations who were granted anonymity to discuss them. Johnson didn't say when he expected the Budget Committee to advance the reconciliation blueprint — a milestone he expected to reach this week — but said he hoped to update the full House Republican conference Wednesday morning.

Some House Republicans are now privately acknowledging the problems in their ranks are so intractable that they might need the Senate to go first — or for Trump to start publicly leaning on the holdouts. Johnson is planning to discuss the way forward with Budget Committee members and senior Republicans Tuesday night, according to three people familiar with the plans.

The situation is "still a giant mess," said a second Republican lawmaker with direct knowledge of the current impasse.

Several Freedom Caucus members are [back-channeling](#) with Senate Budget Chair Lindsey Graham (S.C.) as those factions quietly try to push a two-track alternative to Johnson's plan for one massive bill. Several HFC members sit on

House Budget, where Chair Jodey Arrington (R-Texas), a close personal friend of the speaker's, has struggled to keep the panel united.

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The Senate GOP, meanwhile, has been eager to move for weeks on their preferred two-bill strategy, believing it would let the party get a quick win on the border while delaying the much tougher tax package until later in the year.

Key Republican senators are planning to raise the issue with Trump Friday when they join him for dinner at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, arguing the House GOP is incapable of advancing their bill as time is running out.

After the rebellion of Budget Committee hard-liners scrambled Johnson's plans late last week, GOP leaders pushed chairs to find deeper spending offsets across all House committees. That could mean massive cuts to Medicaid and SNAP food aid benefits, as well as other key safety-net programs vulnerable House Republicans are less comfortable with slashing.

Senior Republicans even noted in private meetings that the Ways and Means Committee would need to find ways to pare back its deficit impact as it pursues massively costly tax-cut extensions.

Even with those additional cuts, it's not clear whether House Republicans will be able to clinch an agreement. Hard-liners are publicly arguing they want multiple trillions of dollars in guaranteed cuts, with some conveying privately they may support closer to \$1 trillion.

Other House Republicans are now concerned about what Johnson might offer the hard-liners behind closed doors.

"I expect this to be the main topic of discussion today and tomorrow," one House GOP lawmaker said Tuesday.

Key centrist Republicans in competitive districts have signaled privately that they are [supportive of new and expanded work requirements](#) on safety net

programs for low-income Americans, including Medicaid, food aid benefits and temporary cash assistance for families who qualify.

But those endangered Republicans are making clear amid the hard-liner backlash that they don't support additional work requirements on parents with children, according to three Republicans with direct knowledge of the conversations. That narrows what GOP leaders can target for savings.

With House Republicans stuck, several GOP senators warned Tuesday that they are prepared to leapfrog over them if the House can't figure out a path forward on its budget blueprint within a matter of days.

"We were giving the House some space to act, but we're also prepared to move forward," said Senate Majority Leader John Thune, who previously indicated the Senate's own blueprint was written and waiting.


Asked if he is prepared to move before the House, Graham said he was: "We need to get moving."

While some Senate Budget members suggested the committee could act as soon as next week, Graham would not give a firm timeline, only issuing a soft warning to the House that he wanted to see what happens over there "in the next day or two."

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